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E.O. 12958
TAGS: [TBIO](#) [KFLU](#) [CACS](#) [AMED](#) [ASEC](#) [ECON](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY PREPARING FOR AI
OUTBREAKS

REF: A) 05 STATE 202102, B) 05 GUANGZHOU 31546, C) STATE
1175, D) CHENGDU 633 E) Guangzhou 06175

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11. (SBU) Summary: A visiting PACOM/State delegation
meeting with civil and military leaders to discuss Avian
Flu (AI) preparedness was impressed with the level of
planning by the Southern Military Command of the Peoples
Liberation Army (PLA). Civil authorities, however, were
less impressive as they provided assurances about AI that
were later found to be false. While the Guangdong Public
Health Bureau (PHB) has developed a reporting system,
response protocols and done some medical stockpiling, the
PLA has also established protocols to manage a general
outbreak and could take emergency response control over
civil authorities. Based on dialog with the Guangdong PHB
it appears that the Chinese policy of tightly controlling
and selectively releasing information on AI remains in
place. End Summary.

The PLA: On the Bench and Ready to Play

12. (SBU) The visiting delegation met with the Guangzhou
General Hospital of the Southern Military Command (SMC),
Guangdong Provincial Public Health Bureau and the Guangzhou
Institute of Bio-medicine and Health (a China Academy of
Sciences Institute). Doctors from the SMC briefed the
delegation on the military's role of working in conjunction
with civil authorities to manage an infectious disease
outbreak. Unlike the U.S., the Chinese Military's advance
planning assumes that they will take some level of command
responsibility over civilian resources in the very early
stages of a crisis. AI is clearly the dominant concern at
this time, and the SMC has developed and continuously tests

protocols for dealing with any infectious disease outbreak. As a part of this responsibility, the SMC maintains an on-going training program for civil medical authorities by providing visiting military personnel to assist civil hospitals establish protocols on infectious disease diagnosis, treatment, stabilization, containment and reporting. The SMC stressed that its role is to develop, train, and manage civil authorities dealing with an infectious disease epidemic/pandemic.

¶3. (SBU) Noting that the SMC evaluated over 30,000 persons during the 2003-2004 SARS crisis, the briefer stated that in addition to the General Hospital and the seven Military hospitals under its command, there are a number of civilian hospitals, clinics and treatment centers that receive training and some level of oversight by the SMC. These places could be quickly mobilized during an outbreak to treat a large volume of patients, though the SMC plan assumes most cases would be treated on an outpatient basis. No absolute number of beds available was stated.

A Finger on the Pulse

¶4. (SBU) The SMC and the PLA Center for Disease Control (PLA/CDC) maintain a system of 70 monitoring units throughout southern China. They do not report to civilian authorities, but they do receive data from Provincial Agricultural stations and the civilian CDC. In this way, the PLA/CDC mirrors the civilian CDC and provincial departments of health monitoring system except the PLA/CDC has no public education or media function. In an emergency, the SMC has plans to deploy its civilian and military personnel to affected areas to assist with

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decontamination, and to enforce pre-established treatment protocols with civil hospitals and clinics. The briefer stressed that the PLA/CDC did not report to civilian authorities and while it did share information with the civilian CDCs, there did not appear to be a mandated exchange of information. (Note: While this separate reporting channel to the national level is well known, it may explain why confirmations of suspected infections are often. End Note.)

Public Health - Playing the Support Role

¶5. (U) While the military response seems to be geared toward managing a crisis, the Provincial Health Bureau's (PHB) role is directed toward early detection, basic training in infectious disease protocols for civilian authorities, and, during a crisis, enforcing established protocols at local levels. Another important job the PHB does is to manage media access to information and reporting on AI issues.

¶6. (U) Mirroring, but not formally communicating with the Military health reporting system, the PHB and Provincial CDC are the provincial leaders for AI planning and maintain a surveillance network in Guangzhou Province based on local civilian hospitals and clinics in 21 cities. This monitoring network's goal is to identify disease trends and assess human contacts within animals and birds -- which are in the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture with which PHB/CDC cooperate. The PHB maintains that it has decontamination and training teams working mainly in rural areas where, according to Director Huang Xiaoling, the need for AI awareness is most urgent. When asked, Director Huang noted that if an AI case were identified, the PHB's role would be to report and transport the person to a hospital designated to receive AI patients.

Chinese Reporting on AI - Looking Through a Dark Glass

¶7. (SBU) When asked about the current situation, Director Huang said that MoA confirms that 95% of all chickens in the Province had been vaccinated and that while there were nine cases of AI in animals since 2004, there were no reports of infections at this time. On March 3, however, CNN and BBC reported that 6000 chickens recently died in Guangdong Province. AI is suspected, but not confirmed. A more telling event occurred the day after the Director made her statement. On March 4, Reuters ran a story about a man who died on March 2 of suspected H5N1 AI, after being hospitalized in Guangzhou since February 22. The Reuters report also stated that Chinese authorities had actively quashed the story telling local media that the case could not be reported until AI was confirmed (ref E).

U.S. Education Powers Advanced Drug Research in China

¶8. (U) In stark contrast to the cadre dominated Public Health Bureau, the Guangzhou Institute of Biomedicine was an example of China's rapidly growing potential. Established in 2004, the Institute has 150 scientists and researchers, half of whom were trained in the U.S. or Canada and among whom, two were nominated for Nobel Awards in Chemistry or Biochemistry. The Institute's primary research is directed toward pathogens and infectious diseases (AI and Acquired Immune Diseases) and cancer research. The lab's emphasis is on developing advanced NA inhibitors (like Oseltamivir, Tamiflu by trade name) and MR Blockers. Of significance, they are researching the feasibility of a "pan-Influenza" vaccine using genetic

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engineering to modify receptor sequences. The Institute maintains its own primate lab to assist with its research. Co-located with the Institute are about 25 other Chinese and joint venture companies most of which conduct bio-medical/genetic based research. The delegation's scientists present believed the lab's equipment to be equal to that found in advanced labs in the U.S.

Comment

¶9. (SBU) If south China experiences an actual AI outbreak, it will be interesting to see at what point the Chinese Government decides to relieve the MOH of its roles as the lead for human pandemic preparation and allow what appears to be the better-prepared military organizations to assume control of the situation and how long this military control would last. It is difficult to determine at this time the level of transparency Post can expect from the Chinese in daily reporting or in a general outbreak scenario.

¶10. (SBU) The PACOM Medical Planning team has seen this message.

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